
HEAR THE UNHEARD: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH OF ADOLESCENT LIFE MEANINGS AFTER EXPERIENCING PARENTAL ABUSE

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ABSTRACT

Violence experienced by adolescents has an impact on them both in terms of personality and the way they view life. This study aims to find out how the lives of adolescents who experience family violence become meaningful. The research method in the study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research type. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling system with data collection methods in the form of in-depth interviews with five participants. The results showed that adolescents who were victims of violence by their parents interpreted life in various ways. They lose trust in others and see life as a struggle for survival. They no longer identify their parents as parental figures. Teenagers see parents as threatening and insecure. Adolescent victims of violence fill their lives with sadness because they do not get affection, and they want freedom from their parents. This study concludes that adolescents who experience violence tend to try hard to survive the hard life they get. The findings of this study underscore the profound impact of family violence on adolescents' perceptions of their lives and interpersonal relationships. Understanding these experiences is critical to developing targeted interventions and support systems aimed at reducing the long-term effects of violence.

Keyword: Adolescent, Abuse, Parent, Effect, Life Meaning.

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INTRODUCTION

Family is the primary education for children because children get the first guidance and education from their families. Family is a primary factor that significantly impacts a child's life. Parents become family members who can shape the character and nature of a child. However, sometimes parents have also committed violence against their children, consciously or unconsciously. Violence has several forms, but parents often give children physical and verbal violence (Loinaz & Sousa, 2020). By using terms like "undermine a child's potential," "utter negative sentences," "children are a source of misery," and other similar ones, people commit verbal abuse. Physical violence is a form of violence involving limbs, such as hitting, slapping, kicking, grabbing, and many more.

Treating children like this can reduce their mental and physical health; besides that, the growth and development of children will be different from children in general (Bross & Krugman, 2020). Violence experienced by children can have an impact internally and externally. The most apparent impact on victims of violence is the physical impact in the form of minor injuries such as abrasions, serious injuries, and death (Mehta et al., 2021). In addition, victims of family violence have increased stress, anxiety, depression, and psychiatric illnesses. Children who get violent actions from their parents will develop aggressive behavior or become irritable (Bross & Krugman, 2020).

Violence perpetrated by parents against children is increasing every year. A total of 21,241 children in Indonesia experienced violence in 2022, with the most forms of violence being sexual violence totaling 9588, psychological violence totaling 4162, physical violence totaling 3746, Neglect, 1269, and other forms of violence totaling 3746 (KPPPA, 2022). There is still a common perception that parents abusing children is natural because it is a way to educate children on discipline. Through physical and verbal violence, parents want changes in their children's behavior. Parents who expect to be able to guarantee welfare and safety, maximize growth and development, and guarantee their children's survival turn into terrible figures for victims of violence.

The presence of children in the family only sometimes gets proper treatment and security, especially from their parents. Some children are less fortunate, so they get extreme action from their respective parents. In such circumstances, providing for a child's necessities is impossible. In addition, when examined based on social-emotional development, these conditions can determine a child's success in establishing relationships with those around him (Greene et al., 2020). Adolescent-parent attachment can directly affect adolescent self-control, which is good, and having a sense of security when in a social environment without the assistance of those closest to them (Smetana & Rote, 2019). A child who grows up with abundant love from both parents is more courageous in establishing relationships with a new environment than a child who does not receive similar affection.

Adolescents will become one of the determining factors in the various kinds of behavior, personality, and values that shape them. Not a few children in their teens have caused many problems. They start from personal problems, family problems, and even problems with social interaction (Orth & van Wyk, 2020).

Adolescents can imitate how their parents interact socially, which can encourage adolescents to have high levels of aggression, which will interfere with their social activities. According to social learning theory, children observe their parents as models and imitate their behavior, attitudes, and emotional reactions to apply them themselves (Bandura & Walters, 1977). Therefore, adolescents accept the learning process through the violence their parents commit, which raises the potential for them to fall into juvenile delinquency. It may be concluded from the previous discussion that parents play an essential role as risk controllers and guardians against juvenile delinquency. In addition, delinquency experienced by adolescents is also a result of the influence of the surrounding environment, which includes peer groups, school, family, and neighborhood.

Children with a friendly environment that supports kindness will be able to control adolescents so that they have adaptive behavior and do not deviate (Roca Campos et al., 2020). Adolescents with positive friendship support can make them have a low risk of developing maladaptive behavior. Conversely, suppose adolescents have friendships that do not support them to behave positively. In that case, it can make these adolescents exhibit maladaptive behavior or juvenile delinquency. This exhibits maladaptive behavior because, during adolescence, the role of peers will become more important than that of their parents (Santrock, 2012). Children who enter their teens will begin to break away from the emotional dependence on their parents so that they can shape what they will become in their social environment. A child who receives physical violence has low self-esteem, his relationship with his surroundings becomes unfavorable, and he experiences difficulties behaving (Khodabandeh et al., 2018).

Parents and other perpetrators of violence are unaware of the wounds caused by adolescents' aggression. This violence will have an impact on the way a teenager sees. The self-concept of adolescents who often experience violence becomes negative (Gewirtz-Meydan, 2020). The way a teenager sees themselves will be different when they get violence from their parents.

There are elements in a negative self-concept, including (1) insecurity, disbelief in one's potential, and worry about negative judgment from others. (2) Lack of self-acceptance or denial of one's condition. (3) low self-esteem, feeling helpless or weak, and easily nervous. If a teenager who has experienced violence feels worthless, has a negative self-concept, and has negative thoughts about things in his life, he will feel that he does not know his purpose in life (Widom, 2022). The purpose of this life is one of the concepts of the meaning of life or something that is valuable and has value for someone. When teenagers can find and fulfill their life concept, they will feel valued and have meaning.

Individuals who can have meaning in life will be encouraged to be helpful and valuable to the environment, society, and themselves. The desire to be helpful will keep a person away from things that can damage him or those around him. The research, through detailed explanations, aspires to comprehend the life implications for young individuals facing familial aggression. Further, it also attempts to extract insights regarding their journey of uncovering life's essence after enduring difficult circumstances and the influence of such experiences on their self-identity and self-regard.

Violence Against Children

Violence given to children, whether physical, emotional, Neglect, sexual, or witnessing violence, will affect aspects of the child's life (Greene et al., 2020). The child's experience of being abused by a parent can lead to repeated behavior where the child will do the same thing to their child. Multiple elements, such as racial background, ethnic origin, and family financial status, can drive violence inflicted upon children within a family environment. The experience of violence can be a traumatic event for children in the long term (Gardner et al., 2019). The traumatic event can hurt the child's condition when they reach adolescence or early adulthood. Conditions that can occur as a result of violence include (1) impaired cognitive development, attention, and low educational attainment and performance; (2) psychological problems such as anxiety, PTSD, depression, psychosis, and unlawful behavior or experiences of violence in relationships, (3) substance abuse problems, (4) sexual health problems, (5) physical health limitations (Strathearn et al., 2020).

Children who experience violence have a lower quality of life (Strathearn et al., 2020). Emotional abuse and Neglect have a relatively strong impact on a person's quality of life. The effects of the violence will significantly impact their external behavior and social abilities, causing their way of survival to differ from that of other people in general. Adolescents who experience emotional violence show delays in developing social and emotional abilities. Sexual activity at an early age and pregnancy at a young age can be one of the impacts caused by violence. Rude and aggressive behavior are also the results of harsh treatment received by children who get violence from their parents (Toth & Manly, 2019). Disturbed domains usually also include academic, social, cognitive, and behavioral. The rough treatment received has the possibility of hurting development. Such adverse experiences can significantly impact one's life trajectory, leading to disruptions in certain functions, subsequently altering the perception of life's significance.

Meaning of Life

The essence of existence is a byproduct of lived experiences and occurrences throughout life. It is seen as very subjective because it relates to the individual's relationship to his experiences while in the world (Frankl, 2014). The meaning of life is seen as personal and can change over time or change situations in life. Humans need to be aware of the existence of life.

The meaning of life has several characteristics, including (1) Unique, Personal, and Temporary, meaning that everyone will feel something considered necessary in life. However, something considered necessary does not mean it is also crucial for other people. The meaning of life means that everything considered necessary can change during the changing times. (2) Concrete and Specific: The meaning of life can be in the form of everyday experiences related to other people. The meaning of life is only sometimes philosophical or idealistic. (3) Providing Guidelines and Directions. When a person gets the meaning of life, he will get guidance and direction so that it seems he is giving a challenge and inviting the individual to fulfill it.

We can stumble upon the meaning of life through many sources, including (1) Creative Value; individuals often experience stress due to too many burdens and thoughts or feel anxious. The fulfillment of material or spiritual activities provides value for himself and others. (2) Appreciation Value can be obtained by giving meaning and deep appreciation of what he receives. Realization of the value of appreciation can be in the form of a sense of love, beauty, and understanding of truth. Life's purpose may become evident through an isolated incident or many life events. (3) The Value of Attitude and experience related to distress, loss, or other misfortunes can be used as a meaning of life with accuracy in addressing it. The value of being able to give meaning to the suffering received by the individual

There are five ways to find the meaning of life (Frankl, 2014), including (1) Personal Understanding, a person's ability to understand one's personality in determining positions and attitudes in the structure of life. This personal understanding includes understanding one's strengths and weaknesses, desires and needs from the past or present, and formulating the realization of future life. (2) Act Positive. Someone who acts positively in their interactions with others will develop a sense of self-worth and inner satisfaction. (3) Familiarity Relationships, relationships with fellow human beings are the source of the meaningfulness of one's life, so good and intimate relationships are needed between humans. (4) Creative deepening, comprehension, and attitude: By integrating these three things, one will have a meaningful life. Deepening creative values can provide something valuable and helpful to others. Deepening appreciation can be in the form of individual acceptance regarding the world's current condition and himself by contemplating the social and natural phenomena or symptoms he receives. Deepening related to the value of attitude can include the upheaval of tragic events experienced so that it will find the meaning of life. Tragic events can be a source of strength and fulfillment of the intention of individual life.

Based on the above background, the purpose of this study is to find out how the lives of adolescents who experience family violence can be meaningful. The benefit of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of the impact of family violence on adolescents' perceptions and meaning of life. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for professionals in psychology, education, and social services to design more effective interventions. By understanding how adolescents who experience family violence make meaning of their lives, strategic steps can be taken to support them in overcoming trauma and finding more positive meaning and purpose in life.

This research is also expected to contribute to the development of theory and practice related to traumatic experiences and strengthening resilience in adolescents.

METHOD

Participant selection is made by distributing participant search posters and asking potential participants to complete a willingness form to become research participants. The researcher selects potential participants based on the criteria set by the researcher. The researcher contacts the selected participants via chat to schedule data collection. The research incorporated participants selected via purposive sampling, explicitly focusing on late adolescents aged 18 - 22 years who have faced aggression from their parents and reside in Malang. The study comprises data collected from five individuals, among whom four are males and one is a female. The violence experienced is physical and verbal violence committed by the father, mother, or both. We ensured data privacy and confirmed the willingness of participants to partake in the study, and informed consent was provided.

The type of research used in the study is qualitative phenomenological, using the interview method. The study aims to obtain experiences from adolescents who have experienced violence by their parents to understand the subjective meaning of life from these adolescents. The description is in the form of the subject's perspective and how they interpret their life.

Data was acquired through semi-structured interviews with participants, allowing a detailed, comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The reason for using semi-structured interview techniques is to be able to explore profoundly existing guidelines and delve deeper into the information provided. The data is collected by writing on paper during the interview, recording the voice using a smartphone, and then creating a transcript from the recording results. Interviews with each participant lasted between 30 - 50 minutes. Data compilation ceased once we had adequate information for the study. However, when additional data is needed, the researcher arranges a different schedule with participants. The level of participant involvement is the most essential factor in the interview process. For data validation purposes, we verified the authenticity of the provided data.

Thematic analysis served as a method to discern themes within the data. We opted for the methodology as it is not confined to a predetermined theoretical orientation or aims to generate new theories (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The authors will read each verified transcript and focus on group notes. Then, author one will list the initial codes, and author two will review the list again. Both researchers will meet to identify and resolve any differences. After creating the initial codes, the first author creates a codebook, giving each code a concise and descriptive name followed by a more detailed description (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The first and second authors each coded three transcripts, noting potential coding revisions and queried utterances. The researchers met, discussed, and resolved differences and revised the codebook. The final three transcripts underwent coding using a consistent process. Post-coding, the lead author collated these codes into distinct themes and subthemes evident across the transcripts. Subsequently, both researchers met to discuss and refine the list. Themes encapsulating disparate ideas were segregated, repetitive themes were removed, and themes not aligning with the research question were disregarded. Irrelevant themes to the research question were excluded.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The violence experienced by adolescents from their parents leads them to perceive life differently from those who have not experienced violence. The received behavior influences their thought processes and life interpretations. The life interpretations of adolescents who are victims of parental violence become a basis and viewpoint for them to survive and continue their struggles. The violence harms adolescents in terms of cognition, feelings, and behaviors.

Loss of Trust in Others

The violence that these adolescents endure destroys their trust in others. Adolescents, who should obtain a sense of safety and protection from their parents, instead experience physical and verbal violence from them. The experience leads adolescents to develop suspicious feelings towards others and to withdraw from their social environment. They foster feelings of mistrust towards others because they assume that if their parents, who are blood relatives, can hurt them, then others also have the same potential to leave and hurt them. The growth of such thoughts makes them apathetic toward their social surroundings.

"... dan aku tipe orangnya tuh merasa kayak nggak bisa berteman gitu. Karena ibaratkan aku tuh punya teman pas waktu ada dia nggak pernah kabarin aku aku jadi punya pikiran negatif ke dia terus aku kayak ya udah lah terserah kamu mau kayak gitu. (...and I feel like I can't make friends. Because, let's say, if I have a friend, they never contact me during hard times, it makes me have negative thoughts about them, and I just let them be...)" (AN.45.D.395-397).

Adolescents who are victims of violence show suspicious behavior and negative thoughts toward others. This behavior leads them to prefer solitude and being close to only a few people. A feeling of safety and love from parents can help a person grow into an individual with healthy interpersonal relationships and firm trust in others (Kennedy, 2016). Violence or rejection by parents makes children grow up feeling insecure and distrustful of others, thus hindering their interpersonal relationships during the developmental phase.

Desire to Achieve Life Satisfaction

Several things determine the life satisfaction of adolescents who are victims of violence. Interaction and satisfaction in social relationships can be essential to someone's life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2018). Dissatisfaction with harsh parental upbringing provides a lack of fulfillment in teenage life pleasure. However, invitations from others to be involved in activities provide pleasure and can enhance their life satisfaction.

"...Kayak semisal kamu di ngechat aku ayo badminton. Aku udah merasa kayak membuatku senang gitu. Kadang apa ya nggak bisa mengajak orang kayak gitu. (...For example, if you text me let's play badminton. That alone makes me happy. Sometimes, I just can't invite people like that.)" (AN.55.E.455-457).

Some adolescents feel grateful because they can still attend school and earn income. There is also gratitude due to the character formed by the violence they experienced. This robust character is what they are grateful for and gives life satisfaction to adolescents who are victims of violence. Factors like interpersonal relationships, resilience, self-perception, and internalized values can sway the contentment levels in life for victims of violence. Life satisfaction is a complex interaction outcome between individual and contextual factors (Diener et al., 2018). All the experiences they go through shape their life satisfaction. Adolescents who are victims of violence have various views related to their future.

"...Abu-abu Sih mas kaya karena hidup saya juga nggak jelas gitu mungkin karena saya punya ketakutan itu tadi atau saya jadinya juga takut juga sih buat menjalin hubungan dekat dengan lawan jenis Takutnya nanti kalau semisal lawan jenis saya atau pasangan saya tahu kalau saya pernah mengalami seperti itu tahu Mama saya masih seperti ini takut dia nggak bisa menerima aja jadi kaya Ya udahlah mendiang saya single aja dulu kayak gitu nggak tahu Sampai kapan tapi kalau naksir pasti ya adalah yang naksir gitu nggak berani buat lebih dari itu (...it's a bit grey, like because my life is also uncertain, maybe because I have that fear or I am also afraid to have a close relationship with the opposite sex, fearing that if my partner knows that I have experienced such a thing, knows that my mom is still like this, afraid that he can't accept it, so it's like, well, I'd better stay single for now, I don't know until when, but if I have a crush, I still have a crush, I just don't dare to go beyond that)".

Those adolescents still do not have a life direction after they start working. This phenomenon shows that victims of violence often have difficulties planning for the future and lack hope for their future. They are just living in the present without thinking about their future. They accept and focus on the life they live now. Views of the future become an essential aspect of life interpretation for adolescents who are victims of violence to achieve well-being. Adolescents who are victims of parental violence have the desire to become individuals better than their parents and are more concerned with their environment. They want to do their best during their lives, like becoming someone positive for others, focusing on their happiness, and enjoying their current life. However, adolescents sometimes perceive their lives as governed by others' expectations. Eventually, they become confused about determining their own life goals.

"...Arti hidup saya, gelap sih maksudnya kayak nggak ada gitu hal yang bisa bikin saya senang gitu istilahnya sma ini yang saya lakuin itu cuman. Saya nggak bisa menemukan cahaya istilahnya buat saya nggak tahu gitu apa yang harus saya lakuin. Apakah emang saya tuh hidup cuman buat ngikutin tuntutan orang tua aja bukan tuntutan diri sendiri. kenapa orang lain tuh bisa melakukan hal yang mereka inginkan sedangkan saya tuh harus melanjutkan ini gitu lo padahal saya nggak passion ada di sini kayak gitu. Yaudah jadi kayak tiap hari tuh nggak ada hari tanpa tertekan gitu mba. Benar – benar saya juga udah nggak bisa nangis sih, tiap malam nggak bisa tidur kepikiran satu dan lain hal, bisa tidur jam 5 langsung bangun jam 7 kayak gitu. Itu benar – benar messed up banget sih (..The meaning of my life, it's dark. There's nothing that can make me happy. I can't find a light, I don't know what I should do. Am I just living to meet the demands of my parents, not my own demands. Why can others do what they want while I have to continue this, even though I don't have passion here. So, every day there's no day without stress. I really can't cry anymore, every night I can't sleep thinking about one thing and another, I can sleep at 5 AM and wake up at 7 AM. It's really messed up)" (AB.134.EI.1083-1092)

No Longer Identifying Parents as Parental Figures

Victims of parental violence also lose their identification of parents as parental figures. The violence they experience can break the bond between child and parent. They no longer regard parents as figures who guard, lead, or provide emotional support. This thing is due to the negative experiences they have gone through, which have destroyed their ideal image of their parents.

"...Saya sudah tidak bisa menganggap orang tua sebagai orang tua saya lagi. Karena apa ya, saya justru disakit secara terus menerus. Harusnya orang tua kan jadi sosok yang bisa melindungi, tapi ini justru menyakiti saya. Jadi saya pengen buruan pergi dari rumah dan gak berurusan lagi dengan orang tua saya biar jadi orang asing aja. (...I can no longer consider my parents as my

parents. Because, I am instead continuously hurt. Parents should be figures who can protect, but this is just hurting me. So, I want to get away from home as soon as possible and stop dealing with my parents, just treat them as strangers.)” (DT.91.K.645-647)

The desire to be free from their parents and to stop dealing with them is a consequence of the violence they experience. The violence they go through causes them confusion about how to respond to the behavior they experience. This violence prevents them from identifying their parents as parental figures due to this inconsistent and damaging behavior (Main & Solomon, 1986). Adolescents who experience parental violence tend to see their parents as a source of insecurity, leading to feelings of insecurity. These feelings of insecurity make adolescents grow defensive attitudes and strive to keep a distance from their parents to create a sense of safety and comfort for themselves (Beckmann, 2020). Feelings of isolation and despair cause them to stop seeing their parents as parental figures, making them feel lost and unsure of how to respond or interact with their parents.

“...orang tuaku tidak mau Fasilitasi aku apapun tapi aku bisa mencari uang sendiri dan aku bisa menghidupi aku sendiri kayak gitu. Aku mau berjuang biar bisa keluar biar gak bergantung sama orang tua lagi (...my parents don’t want to facilitate me in anything, but I can earn my own money and I can support myself. I want to strive so that I can leave and not depend on my parents anymore).” (AN.59.E.494-495)

Life as a Constant Struggle

They interpret life as a constant struggle. They feel trapped in a cycle of violence and helpless to escape their parents' bond. They see life as a constant struggle to survive and fight every day so they can achieve satisfaction or happiness in life. Teenage victims of violence will try to change their situation by no longer wanting to live with their parents, thus achieving happiness from this freedom.

“...maksudnya di bawah kendali ayah saya karena saya ayah saya masih pimpinan kan, saya kerja di perusahaan ayah saya yaudah kayaknya days of pressure coming. Kaya pasrah aja ngikut karena saya mau coba mengubah situasipun gak bisa (...meaning under my father's control because my father is still the leader, I work at my father's company so it seems like the days of pressure are coming. I'm just resigned and following because I can't change the situation even if I try).” (AB.139.F.1142-1144)

The situation where parents who perpetrate violence control adolescents' lives continually makes them feel trapped in a cycle of violence where they feel helpless to change their situation or escape. Individuals who repeatedly face uncontrollable or unchangeable situations may learn they have no control over the situation, so they stop trying to change their circumstances (Seligman, 1972). Adolescents victimized by violence explore strategies to evade or break free from the abusive environment. However, often these efforts do not yield apparent results. This avoidance makes them see life as a constant struggle to survive and feel helpless to change their lives genuinely.

“...kadang kayak agak mellow ketika saya melihat misalnya nih saya lagi makan suatu tempat terus ada anak sama orangtuanya sama ibunya bisa akrab bisa lendot lendot an saya merasa kaya pengen sih gitu. Sebenarnya Cuma saya takut gitu (..sometimes I get a bit melancholic when I see, for example, I'm eating somewhere and there's a child with his parents and they're close and cuddling, I feel like I want that. Actually, I'm just afraid).” (SA.7.E.64-66)

Life is also construed as a series of losses and melancholy. Adolescents subjected to parental aggression often feel their existence is overwhelmed by pain and suffering, dominating their life

experiences. They lose the affection they should have felt as a child, so they never get it under their current conditions.

CONCLUSION

Adolescents who experience violence from their parents lose their trust in others. They interpret life as a constant struggle to survive and fight every day. Persistent experiences of loss and sadness are often attributed to the lack of parental affection. The loss and sadness make them no longer identify parents as figures who protect, love, and care. Instead, they see parents as a threat and a source of insecurity. They desire to achieve life satisfaction where they can be free from the pain inflicted by their parents.

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